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# ***MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES***

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## **BRITISH ARTILLERY DURING OPERATION CORPORATE**

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** British Artillery During Operation CORPORATE

**Author:** Major Chris D Landry, USMC

**Thesis:** British artillery played a major role in the land campaign to retake the Falklands from the Argentineans. The study of the Falklands Campaign provides an outstanding opportunity to analyze modern artillery in limited warfare.

**Discussion:** Faced with numerous challenges, both operationally and logistically, the professionalism and dedication of the British artillerymen proved extremely important to the success of the overall operation. Leaders employed the 105mm light guns in manners that utilized its strengths to deliver effects on the enemy and offer freedom of movement for friendly maneuver units. During the campaign, the British fired a tremendous amount of artillery shells on the Argentineans. These rounds, coordinated with a sound maneuver plan, had a devastating effect and contributed greatly to the ultimate outcome of the war. Specifically, during the assault towards Stanley, the British were able mass its artillery in a manner that overwhelmed the enemy. To accomplish this, the British overcame many operational and logistical challenges to ensure that artillery was positioned to support the fight and that it had on hand sufficient ammunition to complete the mission. More importantly, when called to fire, the artillery batteries were ready, willing, and able. Their fires proved critical in allowing the infantry units to close on the enemy. Much like other previous conflicts, the field units overcame numerous obstacles before gaining success. Artillery operations in the Falklands were no different. However, the British artillerymen met the challenge and provided support when required. In the end, the final lesson, as spoken by the Commander of 3 Commando Brigade, Brigadier Thompson, was that artillery was the most important battle-winning factor.

**Conclusion(s) or Recommendation(s):** In the conduct of the campaign, British artillery usage provides three main lessons important to the United States Marine Corps Artillery community. First, it validated the need to have a lightweight gun in the inventory in order to support operations in areas of limited mobility. Second, the British practice of positioning the most senior artillerymen with the maneuver units proved to be an effective method of providing advice to the commander, conducting fire support planning, and making hasty adjusting to execution of plans. Finally, the campaign revealed the need to train artillerymen in realistic conditions in order to prepare them for the impact of combat operations.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

When Argentina launched its April 1982 invasion of the British held Falkland Islands, Great Britain was unexpectedly forced into prosecuting a limited war in a remote corner of the world. From the beginning, the British envisioned only one possible course of action to deter the aggression: deploy forces to recapture the islands and restore British sovereignty.

Despite its limited strategic value and the common view that the islands were a cruel and unforgiving wasteland, Argentina and Great Britain had been arguing over the Falklands for over a century. Since its discovery, it has been a lighting rod for nationalism in both countries. The fact is that the island mass itself is irrelevant in the dispute. Ultimately, the Falklands conflict represents the tremendous influence that national honor can have on motivating a country to pursue war. But on the operational and tactical side, it represents the tremendous impact that properly coordinated and executed artillery fire, combined with maneuver, has on battlefield success. Overcoming numerous obstacles, British artillery met the challenge and provided responsive and accurate support when required.

This paper will analyze the Falklands Campaign with special focus on the contribution of the British Royal Artillery towards supporting the attainment of victory. As a historical case study, attention will be directed towards both the operational and tactical elements of the conflict. In doing so, the paper will evaluate the planning and execution of artillery support during all phases of the campaign. Additionally, it will review the lessons that can be applied to present-day use and organization of U.S. Marine

Corps artillery as it relates to the use of lightweight artillery, command relationships, and training.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE CAMPAIGN**

Upon learning that an Argentine invasion of the Falklands had occurred, the British political leadership decided to take quick action by ordering the deployment of a task force towards the Islands. Named Operation CORPORATE, the British effort would be a monumental undertaking that would place a tremendous demand on both the military and government. This force, under the command of Admiral John Fieldhouse, was initially foreseen as a show of strength but would eventually be tasked with the liberation of the islands. The British argument for the retention of the islands was threefold: Great Britain was the first to discover the islands, British subjects were the sole occupants therefore the doctrine of prescription applied, and self-determination of the islanders, two-thirds indigenous, dictated British sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

Despite having an established tripwire in the form of a Falkland Island garrison of 40 Royal Marines, the British military had no preexisting war plans for the defense for the islands. An expedition to eject an occupying force was not seen as a realistic option, so there was no “on hand” plans for an amphibious assault.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, CORPORATE would be developed while deploying to the theater.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 38.

<sup>2</sup> Admiral Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 55.

Once it became clear that the Argentineans would have to be evicted from the island, a clear strategy was necessary. The British plan was designed to incorporate three phases during the campaign. In the first phase, the carrier-battle group would prepare the Falklands area for the planned amphibious assault. The mission required the accomplishment of three main tasks: a naval and air blockade of the islands, the defeat of Argentine naval forces, and the securing of British air superiority in the area. Phase two called for the amphibious task force to make a landing and to establish a beachhead on the Falklands. Finally, in phase three, the landing force, supported by naval forces, would defeat the enemy's ground forces.<sup>3</sup>

### **Landing Force Organization**

The task force's ground element was eventually commanded by Major-General Jeremy Moore, and was composed of two maneuver elements, Brigadier Julian Thompson's 3 Commando Brigade of the Royal Marines and Brigadier Anthony Wilson's 5 Infantry Brigade of the British Army. Initially, Thompson deployed as the commander of the ground element but would relinquish the responsibility after Moore arrived in the Falklands with his staff and Wilson's brigade.

The initial landing forces were centered on 3 Commando Brigade, which deployed with all three of its infantry battalions: 40 Commando, 42 Commando, and 45 Commando. To help bolster the Brigade, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the Parachute Regiment (Para) were attached to 3 Commando Brigade. The Brigade was also supported by 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery and with three gun batteries (7, 8, and 79), 29 Battery of the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment Royal Artillery, 59 Independent Commando

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<sup>3</sup> David Drysdale, "The War at Sea," *The Globe and Laurel* (July/August 1982): 228-30.

Squadron Royal Engineers, Special Boat Squadron Royal Marines, 3 Commando Brigade Air Squadron Royal Marines and various aviation and combat service support units.<sup>4</sup>

Once it had been determined that a much larger landing force was required in order to seize the Falkland objects and defeat the Argentineans, 5 Infantry Brigade was tasked with deploying and joining the landing force in the Falkland Island area of operations. The Brigade, having detached two of three infantry battalion's to 3 Commando Brigade, deployed only with 1st Battalion, 7th Gurkha Rifles. However, it was reconstituted with the addition of the 2nd Battalion, Scots Guards and 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards. Providing artillery support to the Brigade was 4 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. Initially, the regiment deployed with only 97 Battery, but shortly after setting foot on East Falkland, 29 Battery detached from 29 Commando and rejoined the command.

## **Artillery Support**

Artillery support for the Landing Force came from 30 guns of which 18 were located in 29 Commando under direction of Lieutenant Colonel M. Holroyd-Smith, and 12 were from 4 Field Regiment under direction of Lieutenant Colonel G. A. Holt. These organizations utilized the versatile 105mm L118 Field Gun. This lightweight artillery weapon weights 4,096 lbs, ranges up to 17,200 kilometers, and fires six rounds per minute at the maximum rate of fire. Furthermore, the guns are air portable when slung under either Puma, Sea King, or Wessex helicopters.

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<sup>4</sup> Julian Thompson, *No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic* (London: Secker & Warburg, Ltd, 1982) 187.

The firing batteries within each of the two regiments consist of six guns each and are commanded by a major. In addition to serving as the unit commander, the battery commander also functions, as the principal artillery advisor to the supported infantry battalion commander and subsequently, is located with him. Also within each battery are 2 captains that serve as forward observation officers and 1 lieutenant fills the billet of gun position officer.

In addition to gun batteries, 29 Commando deployed with the 148 Forward Observation Battery. This organization was composed of men who were carefully selected for their commando as well as spotting skills. Perhaps no other unit was as well prepared to call for and adjust naval supporting fires. Primarily focused on spotting for naval gunfire, the 148<sup>th</sup> was equally skilled in artillery adjustment and control of close air support.<sup>5</sup>

Equally as ready for the task at hand, 29 Commando's organization and predeployment training prepared the regiment exceptionally well to support the task force with artillery indirect fires. Despite being an Army unit, all members of the Regiment were volunteers and were qualified as commandos just like their Marine counterparts. Years of joint training and deployments had built cooperation and confidence between the units. Moreover, repeated winter training in Norway provided them unique experience and equipment for arctic warfare.<sup>6</sup> This would prove to be extremely valuable in the Falklands harsh climate.

Similar to the other deploying organizations, the artillery units were hindered by a lack of shipping space. This, combined with the knowledge that the spongy peat soil on

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<sup>5</sup> Captain Hugh McManners, *Falklands Commando* (London: Grafton Books, 1987) 24.

<sup>6</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 86.

the Falklands would not support vehicle movement, caused units to deploy without its artillery prime movers as well as much of its support equipment. Thus, unusually high reliance was to be placed on helicopters and physical manpower. Much of the equipment that an artillery regiment would hope to take, or be supported by, in war--such as field artillery computer equipment, night observation devices, laser range finders and the support of a meteorological section, drones and sound ranging--was left behind or could not be used.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ascension Island**

Rapidly responding to events on the Falkland Islands, Britain began deploying military forces by launching a task force to recover the islands. In marshaling the force, Ascension Island was utilized as a rendezvous point and assembly area prior to sailing towards the Falklands. Centrally located between Great Britain and the South Atlantic, the island had the facilities to support the logistical preparation and sustainment of the campaign. Additionally, it served as a holding area for the amphibious task force while the carrier battle group proceeded to establish maritime supremacy around the Falklands.

Because the British political leadership wanted to demonstrate quick action and resolve, forces were required to depart England as quickly as possible. Ascension Island then became critically important to the deployment of forces since it offered the British a location to reorganize before entering the Falklands area of operations. Specifically, units took the opportunity to prepare for an amphibious landing by developing plans, cross-decking troops and rearranging equipment on ships. Also, at Ascension, the task force managed to accomplish some training, to include weapons

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<sup>7</sup> Major Jonathan Bailey, "Training for War: The Falklands 1982," *Military Review* (September 1982): 60.

firing, limited amphibious assault drills, equipment checks, and physical fitness workouts.<sup>8</sup>

Individual combat skills became the primary focus in training. Understanding that the Falkland Islands presented a harsh climate and that mobility would often rely on foot movement, commanders instituted vigorous physical fitness training on the troops. Special attending was made towards strengthening feet, legs, and backs. Training in individual combat skills such as weapon handling, field skills, and aircraft recognition also received priority. Not lost in this preparation was the recognition that the troops needed to sharpen their fire support knowledge and call for fire skills. As the commanding officer of 42 Commando, Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux clearly appreciated the maneuver to fire support relationship when he stated:

The other subject on which, fortunately, we placed much emphasis was supporting-fire control. Normally, practical training in this is limited for anyone below the rank of sergeant, and even NCOs are lucky to get much first-hand experience. There are simply not enough artillery rounds or mortar bombs available, and priority is given to the specialist Forward Observation Officers and Mortar Fire Controllers who operate as part of Commando Headquarters or with the rifle company commanders. It was already obvious, however, that in the Falklands unit maneuver would be less likely than fighting patrols; the ability of a marine in a rifle section to call down supporting fire accurately could therefore be decisive. We were lucky in having our Royal Artillery fire control teams with us on the ship; lucky, too, because, in the case of 42 Commando, the whole battery had just been with us in Norway for three months. Not only did they teach us technique, but they also transmitted comprehension of what guns and mortars could achieve. The seeds of essential confidence in fire support were sown while we were outward bound in Canberra.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> D. V. Nicholls, "Amphibious Victory," *The Globe and Laurel* (July/August 1982): 220.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Vaux, *Take that Hill: Royal Marines in the Falklands War* (London: Brassey's In, Maxwell Macmillan Pergamon Publishing Corp, 1986), 28-29.

While on Ascension, the intelligence picture began to sharpen. Up to this point planning the land campaign had been difficult due to a poor understanding of the deposition of the Argentine forces on the Falklands. Having departed England with no aerial photographs and extremely limited intelligence, defining assault objectives and targeting enemy positions was almost impossible.<sup>10</sup> Now with British intelligence capabilities in the region improving, the landing force began to focus its planning efforts on the opposition. Estimates put the enemy strength on the islands at over 10,000.<sup>11</sup> Of special concern to the artillery units, enemy artillery was estimated at 1 1/2 Battalions (approximately 30 guns) of Italian made highly mobile 105mm pack howitzers.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, an unknown number of French 155mm Field Howitzers were believed to be in position to defend the Argentine garrison of Port Stanley.<sup>13</sup>

The weather and terrain would also be a major challenge to the British Artillery units. The terrain of the island is rolling and treeless covered with shrubs, scanty grasses, and scattered wet spongy peat bog. Movement for heavy vehicles and equipment is virtually impossible since the water table lies only a few inches below the surface of the ground and most roads outside of Stanley are dirt tracks. Slightly over half of the 1,800 residents of the islands live on the eastern side of East Falkland in the capital of Stanley. The remaining inhabitants, dwell in a dozen or so widely scattered hamlets with the largest of them being Goose Green and Darwin. The climate during the winter months is chilly, and damp with temperatures averaging 37 degrees Fahrenheit. Light rains are

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<sup>10</sup> Thompson, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 179.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, 36.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Perrett, *Weapons of the Falklands Conflict* (Poole, Dorset: Blandford Press, 1982), 105.

frequent and occur two out of every three days while snow and fog are also common.

Additionally, winds gust up to 60 knots and blow continuously.<sup>14</sup>

## Landing Preparation

Ready to execute phase two of the campaign strategy, the refining of the amphibious assault plans intensified. The first issue that needed to be decided was the date of the landing. A 10-day window from 16 May to 26 May was selected since it represented the earliest date that the necessary ships would be in position while capitalizing on projected optimal weather conditions.

Another issue that needed resolution was the selection of a landing location. This issue became the subject of tremendous amounts of study and discussion. Several sites were deemed available to the task force: San Carlos, Berkeley Sound, and Cow Bay. High on the list of considerations was the desire to insert the landing force as close as possible to the ultimate objective of Port Stanley. Berkeley Sound and Cow Bay met this requirement since it was near Port Stanley and the main enemy force although the area afforded the defender favorable terrain and the British thought that the approaches were mined and covered by fires. Selection of these locations would likely place British forces under Argentine artillery fires before the guns of 29 Commando could be offloaded and ready to provide counter-battery support. San Carlos area afforded the greatest protection to the amphibious task force and with the exception of an Argentine outpost on Fanning Head, which would have to be taken out before H-Hour, San Carlos was undefended.<sup>15</sup> Important to the artillery, the San Carlos area had a sufficient number of suitable

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<sup>14</sup> Bailey, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, 35.

positions to support the gun batteries and high ground outward from the beachhead to locate observation post parties. However, unlike the other options, the location required the landing forces to navigate over 50 miles of difficult ground to reach the main objective at Port Stanley. San Carlos was selected after being recommended by Commodore Michael Clapp, Amphibious Task Force Commander, and Brigadier General Thompson, Landing Force Commander.

With the landing site and date having been finalized, Thompson and his landing force completed plans for the amphibious assault. In developing this plan, Thompson focused on the guidance he had received from Major General Moore:

You are to secure a bridgehead on East Falkland, into which reinforcements can be landed, in which an airstrip can be established and from which operations to repossess the Falkland Islands can be achieved. You are to push forward from the bridgehead area so far as the maintenance of its security allows, to gain information, to establish moral and physical domination over the enemy, and to forward the ultimate objective of repossession. You will retain operational control of all forces landed in the Falklands until I establish my Headquarters in the area. It is my intention to do this, aboard Fearless, as early as practicable after the landing. I expect this to be approximately on D+7. It is then my intention to land 5 Infantry Brigade into the beachhead and to develop operations for the complete repossession of the Falkland Islands.<sup>16</sup>

Thompson and his 3 Commando Brigade developed a landing plan that focused on gaining the element of surprise over the Argentineans. This would be achieved by conducting a night landing at San Carlos. Additionally, by utilizing multiple beaches, the landing force could quickly make it ashore and gain a positional advantage before being detected. The plan was to have four of the infantry battalions initially go ashore while one battalion remained on ship as the landing force reserve. Thompson's plan was to secure

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 73-4.

the high ground overlooking San Carlos by first light. Then, as quickly as possible, one light gun battery would be flown in followed by the Rapier air-defense battery and the remaining light guns.<sup>17</sup> The landing force was to establish the exterior of the beachhead only as far as was safe, sound, and sensible, while they awaited the arrival of Moore and 5 Infantry Brigade which was scheduled to sail from Southampton aboard the liner *QE2* on 12 May.<sup>18</sup>

### **San Carlos Landing**

Before sunrise on 21 May, 3 Commando Brigade began landing undetected in San Carlos, Port San Carlos, and Ajax. With the element of surprise achieved and facing limited Argentinean resistance, the British seized their initial objectives at a small cost. Executed as planned, four battalions went ashore immediately while retaining one battalion afloat as a reserve. 40 Commando assaulted, by landing craft, into San Carlos in order to seize the settlement. On 40 Commando's flank, 2 Para also landed by landing craft in San Carlos and seized the Sussex Mountains to the south in order to anchor the beachhead's right flank. Shortly after, 45 Commando then landed at Ajax Bay to secure the peninsula commanding San Carlos Water. Additionally, 3 Para landed at Port San Carlos to seize that settlement and cut off the northern access to San Carlos Water and the beachhead's northern flank. Artillery began arriving by helicopter at first light with debarkation priority going to the six guns of 79 Commando Battery. Within minutes after establishing the initial position, the battery was in action and firing at a suspected

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 185.

Argentinean machine gun post.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the day, the remaining artillery units continued to arrive ashore and by early afternoon, all artillery batteries were ashore and prepared to support request for fire missions. At this point, 29 Commando had positioned its Main Command Post (CP) at Ajax Bay with it firing batteries operating from areas surrounding Pony's Valley, Bonners Bay, Sand Bay, and Ajax Bay.<sup>20</sup> Upon establishment of the battery positions, each unit then went to work with adjustments to their planned defensive fires (DFs) and final protective fires (FPFs) in direct support to each of the maneuver units. The batteries then remained in their initial locations for several days as the infantry units consolidated their positions and then started to deploy outwards from the beachhead.

As expected, the landing force met limited resistance on the beach from the Argentineans. This clearly made the offloading much easier and allowed units to not only get into defensive positions but also to get supplies and logistics ashore. The exception was the air attacks made by Argentine ground attack aircraft. The target of these attacks; however, were the ships and not the troops on shore.

Now, having occupied reverse slope positions on the high ground with 4 battalions, landed the reserve battalion (42 Commando), and established artillery and air-defense missiles ashore, 3 Commando Brigade dug in and worked to strengthen its defensive perimeter. As mentioned in a previous Chapter, Thompson's intent was for 3 Commando Brigade to secure the beachhead and then wait for the landing of 5 Infantry Brigade and Moore's Headquarters to arrive.

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<sup>19</sup> 29th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery, Operational Report to Ministry of Defense, subject: "Operation CORPORATE, SUTTON, and PARAQUEST, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1982 – 13<sup>th</sup> July 1982," 16 August 1982, 1-1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3-C-1.

The breakout of the San Carlos beachhead was originally designed as a swift movement by helicopter. However, the plan required revision after the loss of 3 Chinook and 6 Wessex helicopters embarked aboard the ill-fated *Atlantic Conveyor* that was sunk on 25 May by an Exocet missile. These heavy lift aircraft were crucial to air assault and logistical support of any advance towards Port Stanley. The bottom line was that the brigade would be deprived of the reserve helicopters needed to make it an air-portable, as opposed to air-supported, force.

The British now had only 13 Sea Kings and 1 remaining Chinook that could carry artillery guns and ammunition. Thompson clearly understood that victory over his enemy required that artillery support was available to his maneuver units. Because of this, he recognized that he would now have to dedicate a large amount of his helicopter sorties not to troop transport but for the movement of artillery equipment and supplies.

Eventually, 85 percent of all sorties were used for this purpose.<sup>21</sup> Obviously this was not an ideal situation; however, Thompson's decision would position his forces for the Stanley assault faster than if both artillery and troops utilized the few remaining aircraft. The bottom line was that the infantrymen would now have to walk over 50 miles towards their objective at Port Stanley and have the benefit of sufficient artillery support during all phases of the movement and attacks.

Faced with relentless pressure from England to break out of the landing sites at San Carlos area and achieve a tangible victory, 3 Commando Brigade began developing plans for the foot movement towards Goose Green and Port Stanley.<sup>22</sup> The obvious target to achieve this quick political objective was the enemy on Goose Green. The small

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<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Firepower in Limited War* (Novato, Ca: Presido Press, 1994), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 229-31, and 262.

settlement was located only 13 miles from San Carlos and was occupied by apparently a weak force. The plan was to have D Company from 2 Para march by foot and secure Camilla Creek House area so that artillery guns could be flown in under the cover of darkness. Upon completion, three 105mm guns with some ammunition would be flown in by helicopter. It was established that only three guns and two hundred rounds of ammunition for each gun could be lifted during the hours of darkness by the available helicopters.<sup>23</sup> The next night the rest of the 2 Para would link up D Company and then proceed to execute the raid. Artillery would support the operation from the position at Camilla Creek House.

On the afternoon of the 24 May, D Company moved out towards its objective at Camilla Creek House. Visibility was so poor; however, that helicopter movement of artillery was prevented. Not wanting to conduct the raid without artillery, 2 Para was forced to terminate the attack shortly after it began. According to Thompson, “it was either that night or not at all as far as I was concerned. The main objective was still Stanley so establishing a strong force on the vital ground of Mount Kent and the nearby features was the most important task ahead.”<sup>24</sup> The impatience from London would now only grow and likely again force Thompson to take Goose Green. This time, the result would be a full-blown attack by 2 Para on both Goose Green and neighboring Darwin.

By 27 May, the remainder of the landing force was ready to advance out of its initial beachhead objectives. The plan called for 40 Commando to establish positions around San Carlos and Sussex Mountains to provide rear area security. While this was being executed, 3 Para would march to Teal Inlet in order to seize Mount Kent and the

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<sup>23</sup> Thompson, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

high ground near Port Stanley. 45 Commando would proceed north to Douglas Settlement and then east towards Teal Inlet to link up with 3 Para. 42 Commando would remain as the Brigade reserve. Movement and positioning of the artillery batteries would be accomplished by helicopter lift in echelon so that the maneuver units would maintain some artillery support.

### **Assault on Darwin and Goose Green**

With pressure building in England to get the landing force moving, 3 Commando Brigade was ordered to take decisive action against Darwin and Goose Green.<sup>25</sup> Brigadier Thompson, saw little strategic value in Goose Green and had preferred to bypass the area and move directly towards Port Stanley as early as possible. Now with direction coming directly from England, this would not be possible. 2 Para, located on the southern flank of the brigade was the nearest battalion to the objective and the obvious choice for the mission. Their orders would be to recapture the settlements of Darwin and Goose Green in order to seize the airfield that the Argentineans were using to receive supplies.

The concept of operations was centered on a six-phase attack designed to defeat the enemy, while maximizing the safety of the civilians held up at Goose Green. This plan was based on an intelligence assessment that gave the enemy strengths in Darwin and Goose Green as two companies with two 105mm howitzers, up to six 35mm anti-aircraft guns, and the possibility of a platoon of engineers and a support helicopter.<sup>26</sup> The basic operation plan developed by 2 Para was:

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<sup>25</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 237.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, 81.

Phase One – C Company was to clear the march route of possible minefields and secure the start line astride the track between Burntside Pond and Camilla Creek.

Phase Two – A Company was to clear Burntside House while B Company cleared ring contour 50. A Company had artillery priority of fires.

Phase Three – A Company was to clear Coronation Point and had artillery priority of fires.

Phase Four – B Company was to clear Boca House while C Company cleared the Airstrip. Artillery priority of fires was to go to B Company, or D Company if it passed through at Boca House.

Phase Five – A Company was to clear Darwin while B and D Companies cleared and held Goose Green. D Company had artillery priority of fires.

Phase Six – C Company was to seize and clear Brodie Creek Ridge

2 Para, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Herbert H Jones, was to conduct the assault on Goose Green with insufficient artillery because of the 3 Commando Brigade's desire to also support the simultaneous movement of 3 Para and 45 Commando towards Teal Inlet. Positioning the guns to best support the attack, Sea King helicopters lifted the howitzers into a depression northeast of Camilla Creek House during the evening of 27 May. Due to the shortage of helicopters and the need support the other 3 Commando Brigade movements to the east, only 12 helicopter sorties were dedicated by the brigade to the 2 Para's artillery. The battery gun position officer, Lieutenant Mark Waring, could provide only one lift for his men, three for the guns, and eight for the ammunition. All together, 28 artillerymen and less than a 1000 rounds of ammunition were ready to support the attack.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, the shortsightedness in Thompson's decision would negatively impacted the assault by limiting artillery support in terms of the amount of rounds available and the responsiveness of the crew members.

At 0300 on 28 May, 2 Para crossed the line of departure and began its attacks on Darwin. Expecting to meet a smaller or equal size force Argentine force, the British were

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<sup>27</sup> Scales, 199-200.

now engaged in battle with a reinforced battalion that was secure behind prepared positions supported by minefields. The day prior to the battle, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) had eliminated any element of surprise by broadcasting the news that British forces were advancing toward the settlements. The Argentines reacted to this public report by moving a reserve battalion by helicopter from Mount Kent to Goose Green early on the morning of 28 May.<sup>28</sup> The leak of vital tactical information made 2 Para's task indeed more formidable.

Faced with advancing over open terrain while also being exposed to a high volume of direct and indirect fire, the main assault force made limited progress against the enemy defensive lines. In an attempt to confront the enemy resistance, fire support was urgently requested. Poor weather conditions; however, restricted aircraft from taking off from the carriers resulting in close air support not being available. Compounding this problem, the mortar platoon depleted all ammunition early in the battle and at 0430; the fire support ship had a gun malfunction and had to depart the area. At this point, artillery support became critical to the commander.

The gunners of 8 Commando Battery executed their first fire mission, in support of the assault, at 0715 when they responded to a request for 30 seconds of continuous fire at “troops in the open.” Doing everything possible to provide the support being requested, the three artillery guns of 8 Commando Battery worked as fast as they could for the next four hours. In fact, the 3 guns expended approximately 900 rounds during the period.<sup>29</sup> It became increasingly difficult; however, to keep the guns firing due to a combination of operational challenges. Not least among these challenges were the large amount of

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<sup>28</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 239

<sup>29</sup> 29<sup>th</sup> Commando Regiment Royal Artillery Operational Report, 3-2,3.

salvage that began piling up around the guns and the tendency of the howitzers to bury themselves in the soft peat causing delays when shifting onto targets. In addition, the battery position received 105mm counter-battery fire throughout the day from the Argentine forces.

In order to get things moving and regain the momentum of the Battalion's attack, LtCol Jones personally assaulted an Argentine trench line and was mortally wounded. Major Keeble, who was previously second in command, now took charge of the battalion and quickly positioned himself to affect the action of the battalion. The first thing he did was to order a company forward to assist the hard-pressed lead companies. Additionally, he recognized that he needed more fire support and directed that the three 105mm howitzers from 8 Commando Battery move closer behind the forward companies.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the morning, extremely high winds had been blowing the shells off course and Keeble hoped that shortening the range would lessen the dispersion and increase the accuracy of the shells. This was particularly important since the companies often had to advance on the enemy within 100 meters behind the fire of the 8 Commando Battery's Light Guns.<sup>31</sup> The decision to deploy from England without the artillery meteorological equipment was now clearly impacting operations. Lacking the means to properly measure and then compensate for atmospheric effects the artillery had no choice but to stop firing and displace to forward positions.

After securing its objectives around Darwin, 2 Para was now ready to move against Goose Green; however, the battalion once again faced an entrenched enemy supported by artillery and mortar. By evening 2 Para surrounded Goose Green and the

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<sup>30</sup> "29 Commando Regiment, RA in the Falklands," *Gunner*. (September 1982): 15.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, 88.

battalion was in a position to seize the objective. After learning from friendly local inhabitants in Darwin that 112 civilians were being held in Goose Green, Keeble developed a plan to offer the Argentines the chance to surrender or be destroyed by artillery and air support.<sup>32</sup> The ultimatum to surrender was then prepared in Spanish and sent into the settlement. While waiting for an answer, Keeble made a request to Thompson for more firepower to support an attack as well as permission to destroy the city if necessary. Both were granted and three more 105mm guns and two thousand rounds of were directed towards his position by available helicopters. At first light on the 29 May, the Argentineans sent a messenger back to 2 Para stating that they agreed to a meeting. At 1000 hours, Air Vice Commodore Wilson Pedroza surrendered the Goose Green Garrison and 1,200 prisoners of war.

In seizing Darwin and Goose Green, the British learned a few valuable things about the fighting capabilities of the Argentine forces. These lessons would serve them well during the remainder of the campaign. Principally among these was the impact of British indirect fires.

The first lesson learned by the British was that they faced a determined and capable Argentinean soldier. His tenacity to endure the pounding from supporting arms fires; however, was questionable. Specifically, after exploding shells had deflated their self-confidence and British infantry began to close with night attacks, the Argentine's will to fight quickly dissipated.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the normally accurate Argentine artillery and mortar fires could be severely degraded with counter fire directed towards these systems.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Scales, 203-4.

The British also learned the value in developing a properly equipped and synchronized fire support plan prior to initiating any offensive action. The overwhelming consensus after Goose Green was that enemy strength had been badly underestimated before the attack and that two mortars, three howitzers, and a frigate were insufficient to support an assault against such a force.<sup>34</sup> Future attacks would be better supported. Thompson and his staff now considered it essential that guns with about 500 rounds of reserve ammunition should support every attacking battalion.<sup>35</sup>

## Movement East

Simultaneously, while 2 Para was attacking Darwin and Goose Green, 3 Para and 45 Commando were moving by foot over the wet and spongy peat bog towards their objectives on the eastern side of the island. Once 2 Para secured Goose Green, it would then also move by foot to tie in with the main force. Finally, 42 Commando was prepared to fly by helicopter to complete the linkage of forces. Thompson's plan was to reposition his units on a chain of mountains overlooking Stanley. He recognized his forces alone could not take Stanley, so he hoped that once this was accomplished, Moore would be on the ground with 5 Infantry Brigade.<sup>36</sup>

In developing this movement plan, the decision was made to use two ground movement routes: a northern axis and a southern axis. The desire to ensure coverage by fire support would become important in selection of the routes of movement. This reveals

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>35</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 262.

<sup>36</sup> LTC Thomas R. Hogan, USA, "No Shells, No Attack! The Use of Fire Support by 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines During the 1982 Falkland Islands War" (Carlisle Barracks, Pa: U.S. Army War College, March 1989), 35.

how important the availability of fire support influenced decisions. With helicopter assets being scarce, leapfrogging artillery to cover all of the infantry moves would be too costly. Instead, naval gunfire would cover coastal routes of movement while artillery was moved forward to support attacks on specific objectives.<sup>37</sup> To accomplish this, helicopters lifted the batteries of 29 Commando Regiment with 1,000 rounds per gun into positions near Teal Inlet and Mount Kent from which they could support the movement and attack on Port Stanley.<sup>38</sup>

On 31 May, 42 Commando was ordered to begin flying into the Mount Kent area and join a SAS detachment that had been operating out of the location since before the San Carlos landings. Two hours after the initial inserts, a Chinook helicopter brought in the first three 105mm guns from 7 Commando Battery and 300 rounds of ammunition.<sup>39</sup> However, on its return to San Carlos, the low-flying aircraft misjudged its height and struck a lake. The helicopter did recover and was able to make it back to San Carlos but remaining flights for the evening were canceled.

42 Commando was now in a dangerous position of only having a portion of its battalion on the mountain and lacking the desired fire support to defend against any attack. Faced with this problem, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Vaux, made a significant decision: L Company would stay back; only one more troop lift would go forward carrying the rest of K Company, Tactical Headquarters, and air-defense; thereafter, all helicopters would be dedicated to lifting guns and artillery ammunition.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> D.V. Nicholls, 254.

<sup>39</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 265.

<sup>40</sup> Vaux, 109.

With an isolated company facing a likely Argentine counterattack, Vaux traded a second rifle company for more artillery.<sup>41</sup>

By 1 June, Major General Moore, the Divisional Headquarters, and 5 Infantry Brigade had arrived in San Carlos. With his arrival, Moore assumed from Thompson the command of the Task Force Ground Element and its two brigades of over 9,000 men. His immediate desire was to get his forces moving east towards Stanley and defeat the Argentine forces with a coordinated attack by the Division.

Artillery organization was adjusted to support the movement and attacks by having 29 Battery revert from 29 Commando back to the command of 4 Field Regiment. Additionally, the division headquarters and its Commander Royal Artillery (CRA) took control of the artillery forces. To a large extent this meant that the CRA relieved 29 Commando of much of its logistical and air defense burden for the artillery forces.

Desiring to quickly link up the two brigades and begin the assault on Stanley, Moore tasked 5 Infantry Brigade to begin a foot march to Fitzroy. Additionally, he directed that 2 Para would be detached from 3 Commando Brigade and attached to 5 Infantry Brigade. With the order to move, the brigade began a foot march east shortly after their arrival. It was aborted and the troops returned to San Carlos; however, only to re-embarked aboard amphibious assault ships to conduct a landing at Bluff Cove. Unfortunately, the ships conducted a daylight ship to shore movement and were attacked by aircraft leaving the British with 51 killed and 46 injured.<sup>42</sup> Despite the setback, the brigade completed the landing and was able to establish a beachhead to support future

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<sup>41</sup> Thompson, 108.

<sup>42</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 281.

operations. With the landing of 5 Infantry Brigade and the movement eastward of 3 Commando Brigade, the British now had two brigades abreast in a line 10 miles west of Stanley.

### **Assault on Port Stanley**

**Planning.** As the British began to develop plans for the final push towards Stanley, they would have to account for an enemy that was entrenched in a succession of well-prepared defensive positions. In the external defensive ring, Argentine forces extended their lines from Mount Longdon through Two Sisters Hill and to Mount Harriet. Closer to Stanley, defensive positions were linked together at Tumbledown, Wireless Ridge, Mount William, and Sapper Hill. In addition to being protected by minefields and clear fields of fire, the Argentine defensive lines also could count on the fire support from (30) 105mm and (4) 155mm howitzers.<sup>43</sup> Moore recognized that he needed to execute a final attack on Stanley before the Argentine defenses could be further strengthened. With this in mind, a plan needed to be quickly developed and an attack launched.

The British plan for the assault on the Argentine position was based on a decision by General Moore to have British forces attack across the entire Argentine front. Moreover, the attacks would be conducted over three phases and would be the first time, in the campaign, that the British would conduct a coordinated assault with its two brigades. During the first phase, 3 Commando Brigade would begin the offensive by conducting a night attack, with three battalions, on the Argentine defenses located on Mount Longdon, Two Sisters, and Mount Harriet. 2 Para would remain in reserve during

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 285.

this phase. The next night, phase two of the plan would be executed when 5 Infantry Brigade would pass through the 3 Commando Brigade lines and attack Wireless Ridge, Mount Tumbledown, and Mount William. Finally, in phase three, 3 Commando Brigade would capture all the high ground south of Stanley, starting with Sapper Hill.<sup>44</sup> Once these objectives were secured, the British would continue forward to Stanley in order to take the city and the defeat the Argentine forces on East Falkland.

Supporting this offensive, a fire plan was developed that tasked gun batteries to be in direct support of maneuver units while also attempting to mass artillery fires to the greatest extent possible. In fact, the maneuver scheme of the infantry lent well to this type of support. By not conducting simultaneous brigade assaults, the artillery could provide maximum support to one unit at a time. The plan was for the artillery to mass in two groups of three batteries in the north supporting 3 Commando Brigade and two in the south behind 5 Infantry Brigade.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, coordinating the fires of all the landing force guns would be impractical since the artillery batteries were widely dispersed and were not positioned to accomplish the massing of fires from all guns. In designing the different fire plans the commanders focused on one basic concept. Friendly lives would be saved and the enemy's will broken quickly if the attack was supported by an overwhelming and continuous wall of firepower.<sup>46</sup> The lessons from the Goose Green assault would be applied.

To support the desired artillery fire plan, the gun batteries required sufficient ammunition. The logistical support requirements to accomplish this proved to be a

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<sup>44</sup> Thompson, 139.

<sup>45</sup> Lieutenant Colonel M.J. Holroyd-Smith, "The Falkland Islands Campaign-Perceptions of a Gunner CO," *RA Historical Society Proceedings* (January, 1984): 10.

<sup>46</sup> Scales, 221.

monumental task. It became necessary to bring forward and preposition 12,000 artillery rounds to forward gun positions. This would require a tremendous amount of dedicated air support. To highlight this, it took a Sea King helicopter at least 1¼ hours just to fly 36 complete 105mm rounds from San Carlos to forward positions.<sup>47</sup> Preparing ammunition stockpiles would be measured in days and not hours. Because helicopter support was at a premium, the getting the allotted sorties to deliver the ammunition became critical. The enviable frustration in getting this accomplished against other priorities would result.

This is evident by a message sent by 3 Commando Brigade to Moore's Headquarters:

1. Understand we only have one Sea King and one Wessex under operation control tomorrow.
2. This allocation is totally inadequate for current resupply tasks eg. 2,000 rounds 105mm ammo.
3. No shells, no attack.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, sufficient ammunition began to be built up. Artillery forward observers could now begin to call in harassing artillery fire on the Argentine defensive positions. Opportunity targets were engaged in the enemy defended areas up to the extreme west of Stanley and Moody Brook. Targets were plentiful with 30 to 50 troops in the open becoming commonplace. In essence, the British land forces were now beginning to shape the battlefield. By 10 June, the artillery was fully in position and ready to support to assault.

**3 Commando Brigade's Assault.** On the night of 11 June 3 Para with the support of 2 Para assaulted Mount Longdon, 42 Commando seized Mount Harriet, and 45 Commando attacked Two Sisters. The timings for each attack was staggered and

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<sup>47</sup> Bailey, 61.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson, 115.

conducted mostly during the period of darkness in order to reduce exposure to enemy heavy machine gun fire. Although there was to be no unusual artillery preparation, and the attack was to go in as silently as possible in the initial stages, there was considerable gunfire support laid on for the subsequent stages.<sup>49</sup>

To support 3 Commando Brigade's attack, five artillery batteries would be available. More importantly, the grouping of guns, as discussed early, allowed artillery fires to be centrally directed, if needed. By organizing this way, artillery provided each attack with considerable support and at least some mass fires. In providing direct support to the infantry units, different priorities of fires were tasked to gun battery.

During the battles, artillery fires became critical to allowing infantry to close with the enemy. In fact over 3,000 rounds would be fired in support of the battles. On both Mount Longdon and Mount Harriet forward observers called in very accurate artillery fire within 100 meters of friendly troops.<sup>50</sup> Advances often took the form of crawling behind artillery fire while naval gunfire blocked enemy escapes. This was clearly described by LtCol Vaux when he recounted 42 Commando's attack on Mount Harriet:

On the Gunner net the urgent, precise voice of Chris Romberg could be heard constantly designating new targets for our guns. Their fire was being brought down with unerring accuracy almost onto the assaulting groups of marines. Afterwards, none of us doubted the decisive role our gunners had played in this battle. Over 1,000 shells or bombs would fall on "Zoya" alone that night, all of them instantly, precisely laid to cover movement, suppress defensive fire, break up resistance. They gave us an overwhelming advantage, only too evident from the shattered enemy strong points, the twitching, cowed prisoners so terrified of their own incoming artillery.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> William Fowler, *Battle for the Falklands: Land Forces* (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 1984), 27.

<sup>50</sup> Vaux, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 177.

Finally, on the morning of 12 May, 3 Commando Brigade had secured Mount Langdon, Two Sisters, Mount Harriet. During this phase of the operation, the British had faced a determined opponent and despite it pressed through to secure key terrain.

With these attacks completed, the British learned a few important things about the Argentine forces. High on the list of Argentine capabilities that had concerned the British prior to the fighting was the Argentine artillery systems. However, initial engagements quickly showed that the Argentineans would not be able to utilize artillery to stop the British advance. The first signal was provided even prior to the actual attacks on the outer defensive positions. After arriving in the Mount Kent area, the British were in the range of enemy guns but received limited artillery attacks. Also, during the attack on Two Sisters, only about four hundred rounds were fired over about four hours. Moreover, when fired they were mostly shot in a piece meal fashion and had limited effects. Basically, the Argentine fire was not effective for two main reasons: the rounds fell into the peat absorbing the effects and the rounds arrived in ones and twos every minute, which made them annoying, but not too dangerous.<sup>52</sup>

Another lesson resulted from the impact of the peaty soil on the effects of the artillery shells. Forward observers quickly discovered that the soft ground was extremely effective in reducing the explosive and fragmentation effect of the shells if the fuse was detonated by contact with the ground. The importance of airburst became obvious and corrections to fuse types were applied. The British now used its available variable-time, radar-controlled fuses.

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<sup>52</sup> Major G. R. Akhurst, "A Gunners Tale" *Field Artillery Journal* (March/April, 1984) 21.

**5 Infantry Brigade's Assault.** Having completed the initial phase of the operation, phase two of the plan to take the Argentine outer defensive perimeters was schedule to begin. As outlined, 5 Infantry Brigade was to secure Tumbledown Mountain, Sapper Hill, and Wireless Ridge. Because of difficulties in getting the Scots Guards into the assembly areas, the start of the attacks were delayed until the evening of 13 May.

The plan had called for 2 Para, now back under the control of 5 Infantry Brigade, to attack from its positions on Mount Longdon to seize Wireless Ridge. Simultaneously, the Scots Guards would assault Tumbledown Mountain. Once this was completed, the Gurkha battalion would pass through the Scots Guards and then attempt seize Mount William. Finally, the Welsh Guards would assault and secured the high ground of Sapper Hill.

Artillery support for phase two would come from the gunners of 4 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery and its assigned two gun batteries. Also, reinforcing fires would be provided from any 3 Commando Brigade batteries that could range the targets. Prior to kicking off the attacks, the guns were fully stocked with ammunition. During the nights of 10 June to 13 June helicopters brought forward over 400 rounds per gun. By the end of the fighting, just about all of the ammunition was required. It was reported that some guns were down to six rounds, and that over 2,400 rounds had been fired in the final advance.<sup>53</sup>

During the delay in the assault, the British artillery guns were put into action. Their mission was to keep up the pressure on the Argentine forces by harassing fires. Also, the batteries exchanged salvos with the enemy artillery located around Stanley.

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<sup>53</sup> Fowler, 28.

By this stage in the campaign artillery fire had shown itself to be very effective. Though Argentine soldiers might not have been killed in great numbers, the constant pounding of British 105mm shells forced them underground and sapped their moral. Some officers watched their young conscripts soldiers reduced to silent immobility by the shelling: ‘they were stunned’.<sup>54</sup>

Once darkness fell on 13 May, 5 Infantry Brigade began phase two and its attack on the Argentine positions. As planned 2 Para assaulted the Wireless Ridge objective and was able to secure it before an Argentine counterattack was mounted. In conducting the attack, 2 Para clearly did not want a repeat of Goose Green so they concentrated overwhelming firepower on the enemy position prior to the assault. The effect of the bombardment was the reduction of the Argentine soldiers will to fight by instilling in him a felling of hopelessness. So effective, an Argentine soldier interviewed after the war remarked, “We were targets for their artillery; lots of times I felt terribly helpless. We didn’t feel like soldiers, we didn’t want to make war, so we felt like prisoners.... I felt I was on the Island of Alcatraz.”<sup>55</sup>

The assault by the Scots Guards on Tumbledown did not go as unproblematic but was made easier by an effective artillery preparation that supported the attack and continued until advancing troops were within 250 meters of their objectives. Later investigation revealed that the preparation destroyed 11 out of 14 machine gun positions in the Guardsmen’s path.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Scales, 223.

However, while pressing forward to the summit, increasing amounts of enemy indirect fires began to fall on the exposed troops. Adding to this difficult situation, high gusting winds and crest clearance in the last 500 meters of the trajectory started to impact the accuracy of the rounds. Finally, artillery rounds were again landing as intended in front of the stalled forward platoons and support fires were focused on specific targets. The shock of this firepower broke the deadlock, and the attack continued up the hill with trenches and bunkers taken at bayonet point.<sup>57</sup>

Now with Tumbledown secure, the Gurkhas quickly passed through the Scots Guards with little resistance to Mount William. Additionally, the Welsh Guards flew by helicopter to positions near Sapper Hill. The Argentine forces were now in a full retreat back to Stanley. The gunners hastened this retreat, as forward observation officers watched and corrected the fire on the tiny, stumbling figures showing dark against the white ground. “It was a most pathetic sight, and one which I never wish to see again,” recalled the Commanding Officer of 4 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery<sup>58</sup>

As the British brigades began arriving on the outer limits of Stanley, the situation for the Argentineans became hopeless. Faced with certain defeat, the Argentine Commander, Major General Mario Benjamin Menendez, agreed to a ceasefire. Later that evening he eventually agreed to the surrendered of all his forces on the island.

During the fighting for the high ground surrounding Stanley, artillery batteries supported the two brigades with constant massive and accurate fires. In all the 30 howitzers fired nearly 17,500 rounds on the Port Stanley defenses. Some howitzers fired

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>58</sup> Flowlar, 29.

as many as 500 rounds in the last 24 hours of the battle.<sup>59</sup> Maintaining this pace put a huge demand on the artillery personnel and their effectiveness is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of the men in these units. Within the batteries men had to frantically tear open boxes and containers and then prepare the shells for firing. Cooks, air defenders, and stray onlookers were pressed into service as ammunition handlers to satiate the appetites of the hungry guns. Frantic efforts by resupply helicopters kept enough ammunition forward with the guns so that firing was never interrupted.<sup>60</sup>

The focus of the artillery fires was on both enemy front line positions and specific targets in the village of Port Stanley. These rounds combined with the volume at which they were being delivered on the enemy played a major role in the eventual outcome of the battle. As noted by the commander of 7 Commando Battery, “The final collapse of the enemy was directly due to the effects of artillery. Constantly harassed, constantly exposed to accurate and lethal fire, their moral shattered and defenses, crumbling, the Argentineans surrendered.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> U.K. Secretary of State for Defense. *The Falkland Campaign: The Lessons* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1982), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Scales, 221.

<sup>61</sup> Akhurst, 20.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR US MARINE CORPS ARTILLERY**

British artillery operations during the Falklands Campaign provide an excellent case study into artillery employment in small wars. Deployed on short notice into a demanding environment, the British artillery faced a well-equipped foe. Their units were equipped with the right howitzer for the mission and an effective command relationship with the supported infantry to meet the challenges. Also, the training level of their artillerymen helped them to quickly adapt to situational challenges as it appeared. Despite differences in equipment, doctrine, and readiness from present day United States Marine Corps artillery, the British experience has implications for artillery units today.

#### **Value of Light Artillery**

The British use of the lightweight 105mm howitzer during the Falklands Campaign demonstrated the flexibility and effectiveness that light artillery can provide to expeditionary forces. The gun's light weight proved to be extremely adaptive to operating in the soft peat that covered the Falkland Islands and its air mobility gave the artillery forces a weapon system that was relevant on the battlefield. Overall, the British howitzer was the ideal gun for use over this type of terrain.

Faced with firing from positions that were not always suitable for delivering sustained bombardments, gunners had to make the best of their spongy firing positions. Once in place, helicopter availability to relocate guns to alternate positions was not practical. The main problem facing the artillerymen was that the guns sank deep into the

bog once firing began. In fact, after firing 20 or 30 rounds, a gun had to be pulled out of the mire, repositioned, and re-aimed. Five or six guns could be kept in action by passing a tracked vehicle up and down the gun line, continuously winching out a gun at a time.<sup>62</sup> Despite the lighter weight of the British 105mm howitzer, the demand of maintaining fire support in this type of environment was extremely challenging.

The British light gun also proved valuable in overcoming ground mobility challenges on the island. Faced with virtually no ground transportation to move the howitzers and ammunition from one position to another, the limited helicopters available to the British forces were utilized. These helicopters externally lifted the four batteries supporting 3 Commando Brigade from the ships to the high ground ashore during the landing at San Carlos. While at Goose Green, helicopters initially lifted 3 guns, ammunition, and personnel from 8 Commando Battery to support 2 Para's attack and then later brought forward the remaining elements of the battery. Finally, five batteries with a large volume of ammunition were lifted eastward from San Carlos to the Mount Kent area and beyond to support the attack on Port Stanley.<sup>63</sup> During each of these lifts, high winds and poor visibility made the task of moving the guns and ammunition by helicopters a difficult but achievable challenge for the pilots.

Because of factors beyond the scope of this paper, today's US Marine Corps artillery is limited to operating with a much heavier 155mm howitzer. Despite being a very capable gun and highly effective in most environments, the howitzer is extremely heavy and tends to become bogged down in less than ideal terrain conditions. It is highly unlikely that this gun, or its currently planned lightweight 155mm replacement, would

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<sup>62</sup> Scales, 225-6.

<sup>63</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 240-41.

have been capable of sustaining support to the infantry units had it been tasked with supporting the British operations on the Falklands. Simply, it was difficult enough operating British howitzer that weighed 4,096 lbs much less attempting to shoot and move a howitzer that weighs greater than 9,000 lbs. Since United States Marine Corps forces are America's premiere expeditionary force it must be able to deploy and operate throughout the world. It is also expected to effectively execute its mission regardless of terrain and weather constraints. The Falklands Campaign validates the need to possess more than one caliber of howitzer, in the inventory, so that if required, artillery support is available to the commander regardless of the environment of the operation.

### **Command Relationships**

Another factor in the success of the British artillery, during the Falklands Campaign, was the strong linkage that existed between their artillery and maneuver units. This relationship was built on a high degree of trust and confidence that resulted from command relationships that helped to provide for quick and responsive fires. Much like the direct support relationship that exists between US Marine Corps infantry and artillery units, the British artillery provided officers to the maneuver units. What is different with the British model was that the artillery sent its most senior officers to the supported infantry contrary to the US Marine Corps method of retaining its senior personnel to operate at the artillery position. During the Falklands battles, the value of the British model proved to be effective in both the development of fire plans and responsiveness when the "fog of war" was at its greatest.

The aim of any artillery command structure must be the quick and accurate concentration of large volumes of artillery fire in response to the demands made as the battle develops. In the Falklands, the British achieved this by positioning experienced artillerymen to develop fire plans and influence the infantry scheme of maneuver. The assignment of a captain as the forward observer while also locating the artillery commanders along side of the supported infantry commanders was the primary way this was accomplished and proved effective during the campaign. The experience, age, and rank of these leaders added creditability in ways that junior officers are incapable of achieving.

The British model also proved to be highly responsive to changes on the battlefield. Since the commander is positioned forward with the unit being supported by the artillery, his request for fire is a demand or order to his battery. The result is an artillery unit that responds rapidly to their supported infantry units. To understand this point, one only has to look to remarks by a battery commander when he points out the flexibility it provided when situations rapidly changed on the battlefield.

“Fire plans, inevitably collapsed when the first timed serials had been fired. After that, targets became “on call.” Any thought of shells landing at least 600 meters away were immediately scrapped; in order to win, artillery was brought down directly in front of, and in many cases amongst, our lead troops. Amazingly there were no casualties to our side. Because the battery commander and forward observation officers were right with the infantry commanders, the fire could be turned on and off at will.”<sup>64</sup>

## **Realistic Training**

A commonly held perception among military personnel is the belief that realistic training is important to early success on the battlefield. In fact, United States Marine

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<sup>64</sup> Akhurst, 20.

Corps doctrine supports this idea when it states that “exercises should approximate the conditions of war as much as possible; that is, they should introduce friction in the form of uncertainty, stress, disorder, and opposing wills.”<sup>65</sup> The Falklands conflict is no exception to this rule and in fact provides several recent historical examples in areas of training that United States Marine Corps artillery units should consider. Whereas the campaign and its setting is unique, the conflict provides a study of the general realities encountered in battle.

The first of these lessons is the need to expose troops to the effects of artillery burst in the form of live fire artillery training. No other skill was less practiced by British artillerymen before the campaign than shooting “Danger Close.” In the long and costly battle for Mount Longdon, the enemy positions were captured only by the two fold process of calling for fire within 50 meters of pinned down troops, and then immediately engaging bunkers using antitank rockets and grenades. More than one participant noted that close combat at night is not the time to learn such skills. Prior to the Falklands campaign, most of the British troops had no idea what a 105mm shell sounded like at 50 meters, let alone its effect. While they were getting used to it, the enemy had the upper hand. Similar to British forces, the United States Marine Corps emphasis on safety in peacetime training often takes away the sense of realism. To address the problem, the Marine Corps needs to incorporate into its training the requirement that all combat arms Marines be exposed to the live artillery or mortar burst at close ranges. This can be accomplished by delivering artillery rounds on top of occupied overhead bunkers. The United States Army Field Artillery Officers Basic Course (FAOBC) has safely included this event into the forward observer training for many years. The students of the course

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<sup>65</sup> MCDP 1 Warfighting (Washington DC: Dept of the Navy, HQUSMC, 20 June 1997), p 60-1.

simply adjust the rounds towards the occupied bunker until it impacts within 50 meters.

Having personally experienced this training event, I can testify that despite being located within a bunker, an individual can appreciate the effects of the burst. In addition to live fire training, Marine units should utilize artillery simulators during field training. These devices provide a less expensive method of adding realism and familiarity with indirect fire burst.

Another important lesson for United States Marine Corps is the need to prepare artillerymen for the intensity of operations. This intensity, combined with the duration of operations and its imposed workload, was higher than in most exercises. Besides the demands for local security, digging, cooking, and sleeping, gun batteries encountered the novel experience of receiving large quantities of ammunition, preparing it and dealing with salvage. As the British quickly learned, these requirements can overwhelm a battery position if it is not prepared to deal with the challenge.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

British artillery played a major role in the land campaign to retake the Falklands from the Argentineans. Faced with numerous challenges, both operationally and logistically, the professionalism and dedication of the men on the ground proved extremely important to the success of the overall operation. Leaders employed the light guns in manners that utilized its strengths to deliver effects on the enemy and offer

freedom of movement for friendly maneuver units. In the end, the final lesson, as spoken by the commander of 3 Commando Brigade, Brigadier Thompson, was that artillery was the most important battle-winning factor.

During the campaign, the British fired a tremendous amount of artillery shells on the Argentineans. These rounds, coordinated with a sound maneuver plan, had a devastating effect and contributed greatly to the ultimate outcome of the war. Specifically, during the assault towards Stanley, the British were able mass its artillery in a manner that overwhelmed the enemy. To accomplish this, the British overcame many operational and logistical challenges to ensure that artillery was positioned to support the fight and that it had on hand sufficient ammunition to complete the mission. More importantly, when called to fire, the artillery batteries were ready, willing, and able. Their fires proved critical in allowing the infantry units to close on the enemy. Much like other previous conflicts, field units must overcome numerous obstacles before gaining success. Artillery operations in the Falklands were no different. The British artillerymen met the challenge and provided support when required.

Responsive and accurate, the artillery gave the landing force its most effective supporting fires. British field commanders praised both the artillery support and the fire-support planning of the battery commanders assigned to them.<sup>66</sup> The massive artillery barrages outside Port Stanley caused much destruction and greatly weakened the willingness of the Argentine conscripts to resist. War correspondent Max Hastings paid the artillery the highest tribute when he commented, "...indeed, the (artillery) gunners'

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<sup>66</sup> Major Timothy J Hannigan, USMC, "British Triumph on East Falkland" (Quantico, Va: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, April 1984), 98.

contribution to most of the battles of the war was decisive.<sup>67</sup> The interrogation reports reflect that the Argentine forces surrendered early because the British artillery was devastating their gun positions, headquarters, and logistic system.<sup>68</sup>

The study of the Falklands Campaign provides an outstanding opportunity to analyze modern artillery in limited warfare. The unique terrain of the Falkland Islands combined with its harsh weather conditions provided many operational challenges to the British; however, the impact of these conditions on artillery functioning can be applied to other more common conditions throughout the world today. In the conduct of the campaign, British artillery usage provides three main lessons important to the United States Marine Corps Artillery community. First, it validated the need to have a lightweight gun in the inventory in order to support operations in areas of limited mobility. Second, the British practice of positioning the most senior artillerymen with the maneuver units proved to be an effective method of providing advice to the commander, conducting fire support planning, and making hasty adjusting to execution of plans. Finally, the campaign revealed the need to train Marines in realistic conditions in order to prepare them for the impact of combat operations.

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<sup>67</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 319.

<sup>68</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Holt, RA “The Falkland Islands 1982 – Some Lessons to be Learnt,” *Journal of the Royal Artillery* (March 1983): 9.

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